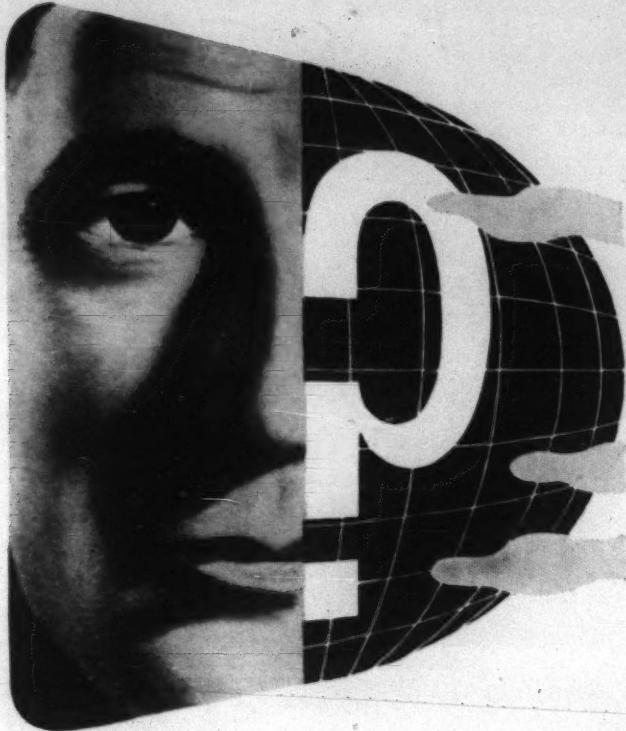


film *news*





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DOCUMENTARY

film news

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EXEUNT

BRITISH FILM CRISIS

Scene 1, Wardour Street

HAROLD WILSON:

The industry has been having financial crises throughout its history.

DAILY FILM RENTER:

Really though, this parrot cry of crisis is a bit wearying.

HARRY MEARS (CEA):

The only things that can save us are a revision of entertainment tax, and a reduced quota, or better still, book British films on their merits.

SIR ALEXANDER KORDA:

The Scottish critics, who should know ...

TODAY'S CINEMA:

One is tempted to wonder how Mr Wilson feels now, about the ill-advised policies he has adopted for the film industry — policies which have alienated American goodwill, and have resulted in diminishing markets elsewhere.

BRITISH FILM PRODUCERS' ASSOCIATION:

The Quota can be filled.

SYDNEY WYNNE (Rank PRO):

If you looked at the national Press, you would think the British Film Industry was a corpse.

STUDIO WORKERS:

Representatives of the ten studios now open met on Sunday and called for a new public relations policy from the unions to supply the true facts of the film crisis to the public.

DAILY FILM RENTER:

One way and another, labour is ruling the roost—or, at least, trying to.

KINEMATOGRAPH WEEKLY:

Mr Wilson told delegates of the studio union on Tuesday that he had plans to assist the immediate financial problems of producers through private channels of finance.

ASSOCIATION OF CINE TECHNICIANS:

We asked Mr Wilson to commandeer two studios and make them available to independent producers, while making sure that they receive distribution and exhibition facilities.

DAILY FILM RENTER:

The question of nationalization was raised several times, but was ignored by the President of the Board of Trade.

ALL (Except ACT):

Goody, Goody.

Film in Educational and Social Life

By DILYS POWELL

IT WAS, I believe, the Duke of Wellington who, faced with the development of the English railway system, opposed the movement on the grounds that it would encourage the poor to wander aimlessly about from place to place. Today we move about aimlessly, no doubt, and a great deal faster than in Wellington's time. But when I say, repeating a truism, that we live in an age of speed. I mean not simply that transport is quicker and communication more abrupt than ever before. I do not mean simply that we have made it possible to project high explosives farther and faster, or that atomic fissure has made the old diplomatic methods of presenting an ultimatum appear delightfully leisurely. I mean that the pace of discovery, development and superannuation in the world of ideas itself has acquired a new haste. Even memory is shorter: quicker to forget. It is almost exactly seven years to the day since the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour and the opening of the first great Russian offensive which drove the Germans from Moscow. But we forget: memory can only with difficulty recapture the emotions of those huge days. So much has intervened: so many crises, such fabulous experience. 'The world is so full of a number of things, I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings.' The world is so full of a number of things that the mind refuses to accept them. In this age of speed in change the mind feels the need to protect itself, to preserve some kind of stability by forgetting, sometimes by ignoring. Four centuries ago the curious and subtle Montaigne found humanity elusive, changeable, diverse. In the twentieth century the human individual is the stable, the changeless factor.

This world of change and speed has been a bad nursery for the artist. The new instability of the framework of society was recognized a quarter of a century ago and more by T. S. Eliot, when in *The Waste Land* he described a civilization rusting away under the influence of uncertainty and disbelief. Eliot was to return to a system of religious belief; since Eliot some of the more confident spirits among younger poets have tried to find conviction in the very change which surrounded them, to elicit the material of poetry from the physical imagery of the slag-heap and the turbine. The attempt was, one feels, looking back at the 'thirties, unhappy; and nearly all that is valuable in the poetry of our time has proceeded from a revolt against

the form and pressure of the age. But for the cinema, that upstart arrogant art, the air of change has been life itself. It is in change that the cinema has grown and flourished, and of change that it has been a manifestation. Nothing has been more mutable than the cinema with its suddenly shining and suddenly vanishing stars and its films out of date in a decade. And nothing has been more indicative of mutability than the development of this popular pleasure.

Less than three years ago we were celebrating the fiftieth birthday of the films. Two years ago we remembered that the sound film, the talking picture which we accept without question, was only twenty years old. The vast majority of those who go to the cinema today—since the films are the pleasure of the young rather than the old or the middle-aged—have never seen a silent film. They take it for granted that the shadows on the screen will speak and bang doors, and that love-making will be accompanied by full, invisible orchestra. Even those who remember the silent film—which itself advanced from the accompaniment of a single pianist rattling off Mendelssohn's Spring Song or Chopin's Funeral March to the splendour of a full-team in the orchestra pit—even they take for granted the elaborate technique of the contemporary motion picture. Yet the thing has grown in a man's lifetime. Fifty years ago or less the film was a fair-ground turn, a peep-show. Literally a peep-show: relics still persist on Brighton Pier, where the slot-machines will show you primitive films of dancing girls and similar delights; I do not guarantee that you will see what the butler saw, but you will see something very like it. In my childhood the cinema had escaped from the peep-show, but it was still treated with small respect: it served, for instance, as a last turn in the music-hall. One went to Boscombe Hippodrome to see Marie Lloyd or George Lashwood; the audience trooped out to the accompaniment of a vaguely flickering news film. You can judge how immense the change since then in social status. Today we have a National Film Library and a Royal Command Film Performance; and the cinema enjoys the serious attention of the Royal Society of Arts.

In half a century, then, we have made an honest woman of the cinema; though there are a few people left protesting that the woman is still fallen; not so long ago I was honoured with a tract assuring me that films

were red with ruin. The reformers speak, I take it, of the fiction film, not of the documentary or instructional cinema; unless, of course, they have discovered indelicacy in the glimpses, admirably offered in this country by educational film-makers, into the private life of the fern, the stickleback or the liver fluke. No doubt of it, the reformers are right to concentrate on the film made, not for instruction, but for fun. The documentary and educational film has grown out of recognition during these last twenty years; in this country it reaches a large and a growing public. But it forms only a fraction of the cinema as a whole; its influence cannot equal the influence of the fantasies, brilliant and alluring, which draw queues night after night, week after week, to theatres rightly called, in the old days, picture palaces. The influence of the fiction film is upon the whole public, or nearly the whole public: listen in a crowd, in a train, in a bus, and sooner or later you will hear the conversation turn to the piece at the Odeon or the Granada. And I think it will not be out of place, in this brief consideration of the development of the film in educational and social life, to look back for a moment over the moods and the themes of the popular cinema.

The producer's difficulty has always been to find subjects enough to satisfy the public longing for a story, and it is only natural that the screen writer should spend much of his time at the library shelves. In the early years of the cinema literary originals, from the classics downwards, provided plots for one-reel films; *Parsifal* was rattled off in less than ten minutes, and so were *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *As You Like It*. Those were the days of the cinema's innocence, when emotions were simple and morals clearly defined. We were to wait forty years or so for the advent of schizophrenia, which today explains all and excuses all. And when the first and greatest of all the creative artists in the cinema began to make himself felt, when the American D. W. Griffith began directing the vast panoramic films which taught the world to take the cinema seriously, the morals of the screen were still Victorian morals, dominated, like the novels of Dickens, by simple concepts of courage, loyalty, love, tenderness.

In the decade which followed the grand period of Griffith, other concepts were influencing the screen, and, through the screen, the millions who by the 'twenties were going

to the cinema. Already during the 1914-1918 war Theda Bara had created a new film type—the vamp. By 1919, Cecil B. DeMille was remarking: 'The ruined woman is as out of style as the Victorian who used to faint'; and in the years after the war a sophisticated and cynical view of sex temporarily superseded the romantic view. It would be rash to claim that the sophistication of the films in this period had any very great direct influence on behaviour. But the screen, which acquired early in its life a remarkable sensitivity to popular moods and fashions, by reflecting certain current ideas helped to make them known to a vast public. It would, I think, be fair to say that the screen familiarized audiences living remote from capital cities with metropolitan shades of feeling.

Yet in spite of this note of cynicism in the films of the 'twenties the cinema retained to the end of the silent period its basic innocence. The great comedians of the 'twenties—Charles Chaplin, Harold Lloyd, Buster Keaton—spoke, without a word said, the universal language of fun. Those were the days when a good film was a good film for everybody. No division had been set up between the highbrow and the popular audience; nobody was too smart to enjoy the cowboy exploits of Tom Mix. I must not fall into the trap of talking about the cinema as if it were a purely American creation. By the second half of the 'twenties the work of Continental directors was leaking into this country: French realism, German expressionism, Swedish landscape-painting, and, presently, the troubling revolutionary furies of the Russians. But, if we are to consider the cinema as an element in English social life it is mainly to the output of America that we must look—mainly, that is, until we come to the 1940s, to the renaissance of our native cinema and the revivifying influence of the documentary style. The suffocation of British films during the 1914-1918 war and after is an old, sad story. I need not recount here the stages by which American films came to occupy, to the exclusion, almost, of everything else, British screens; nor is this the occasion to enumerate the attempts at legislation for the benefit of British film-makers in the home market. Today, twenty years or so after the first suggestions of a quota for British films, our native industry has reached yet another economic crisis. But today at least we can see films which reflect, however crudely, the life of our own people. For a quarter of a century audiences from Land's End to John O'Groats looked, when they went to the cinema, at the American scene: American cities, clothes, habits. For more than a decade they listened to American speech and American idiom. In all that time a boy or girl in a manufacturing town in the north or a market town in the south might well have had a clearer idea of New York or Chicago than of London.

The influence of films on popular habits and ideas increased with the addition of

sound to the silent shadows of photography. And with the loss of silence the innocent age of the cinema ended. Henceforward the screen was to speak with undertones of knowledge, good and evil. The simple, naive poetry of love and courage was gone, never to return; speech had introduced new complexities into the interpretation of life and character. We have all felt at times how basely the cinema has betrayed its opportunities for the rendering of the human scene. But it is fatally easy to be pompous about the films: to complain about their vulgarity, their silliness, their frequent brutality, and to forget that, simply because the cinema is ubiquitous and powerful, it is apt to be judged more harshly than the popular manifestations of the other arts. The critics of social influences never think to read the thousands of bad and vulgar novels; they ignore what is odious in the newspapers; their attack is concentrated almost wholly on the cinema. Yet humanity fell now and then into error before the invention of the cinema; and, indeed, much as I personally shrink from the savagery of many a gangster film, I should hesitate to recommend in its place one of those pleasant outings, popular with our ancestors, to a public hanging.

One must beware, too, of over-estimating even so minor a part of the cinema's influence as its effect on fashions and manners. In the United States, it seems, direct imitation of the film star is widespread; when Norma Shearer played Juliet, millions of American women appeared in jewelled caps; when the English film of *Pygmalion* was shown, American shop-girls brushed up their society manners by reading what a public library called 'books Eliza should have read'—books such as *Well-Bred English* and *Give Yourself Background*. When Clark Gable, in *It Happened One Night*, disclosed the fact that he wore no undershirt, 'the sale of masculine underwear', says Margaret Thorp in that excellent book *America at the Movies*, 'declined so sharply immediately afterwards that knitwear manufacturers and garment workers' unions sent to the producers asking them to take out the scene'. The English are less sensitive about their underwear or, indeed, their overwear: at any rate I have not heard that the demand in this country for frilled shirts was appreciably altered by the appearance of James Mason in *The Man in Grey*. Yet, no doubt of it, the movies do affect mass fashions. I for one can see little harm in an influence which persuades young women to brush their hair more often and keep themselves, as the advertisers have it, neat about the ankles.

I may seem to be dwelling on the social consequences of the popular film when I might devote my time to discussing more solemn and perhaps worthier material. But thirty million tickets or thereabouts are bought for the cinema in Britain every week; and to the buyers the cinema does not mean

the documentary film, nor the newsreel, nor *The March of Time*, nor *This Modern Age* even—though one learns with gratification that this British series of inquiries into political, economic and controversial subjects has a growing public. In London and in one or two provincial cities the Continental cinema has a small adoring audience. But to the shop-girl, the mill-hand, the office-worker, to the boy or the girl just leaving school to earn a living, the cinema means Danny Kaye and Margaret Lockwood, it means Rita Hayworth and Abbott and Costello, Stewart Granger and Humphrey Bogart, Lana Turner and Bing Crosby, Bob Hope and Dorothy Lamour; it means romance, colour, excitement and an escape from the fog, the bus-queue and the gas-ring.

Players such as these, figures seen only as shadows on the brilliantly-lit rectangle at the end of the auditorium, are sharply real to those who go often to the cinema; there are times when they seem more real than Mr Attlee. They have become part of the fabric of life. The impact of their imaginary adventures may be superficial. Yet the fantasies which they create, fantasies of love and death, fantasies of wealth, romance and the underworld, are in their cumulative effect more powerful even than those serious and realistic films which now and then, bragging a little, edge on to the universal screen. For the cinema of entertainment has its serious moments: more than is commonly conceded; now and then there even emerges some great monument to human suffering and tenacity, such as, before the war, *The Grapes of Wrath*. *The Grapes of Wrath* came to us from America; Hollywood still sends us now and then some essay in controversial fiction, a *Gentleman's Agreement* perhaps. I believe myself that the moral influence of these openly didactic fictions is small, and that anyone already blind enough and stupid enough to be, say, anti-Semitic will not be converted by *Cross-Fire*—which belongs to the same controversial group as *Gentleman's Agreement*. But the mention of these titles, with their reminder of the present attempt in Hollywood to set against the pure fantasy of the musical film the solid and occasionally savage realism of the message-film, brings me to a crux in the social history of the cinema; the emergence and the influence of the documentary film.

In the period of the silent cinema, programmes were often padded out by what were known as interest films; films, that is to say, whose distinguishing quality was that they were not interesting. Anybody who frequented the films in those far-off days will remember the interminable trips through meaningless landscape, the busy little fingers making useless articles, the coolies hacking away in fields full of puddles. It was not until well on in the 'twenties that the film of fact, transformed into what we now call the documentary, made a genuine and exciting contribution to the cinema medium in Britain.

For the sources of the contemporary documentary we must look not to the interest film but to the work in America of Robert Flaherty and to the Russian cinema, which, bursting on an affrighted world, taught a young Scot, John Grierson, among others that the ordinary man, living and working, was in himself heroic and his work in itself exciting.

So much that is valuable has been said and written about the development of the documentary film in this country—I recall in particular a lecture delivered before the Royal Society of Arts by Sir Stephen Tallents himself—that I should be tedious were I to go over the ground again. Today the farmer, the cook, the doctor, the engineer, the naturalist can learn from the factual film; he can assimilate new methods and involved techniques through this visual medium; he can learn about the behaviour of butterflies and the workings of blood transfusion; he can learn how to make steel, how to drive a tank, even how to make short pastry. All over the country specialized audiences are grappling, helped by the instructional film, with fresh ideas and techniques.

But when we come to look we see that the triumph of the instructional film is a direct result of the war we have just survived. Modern war means that unskilled men and women have to learn at speed highly skilled trades; they have to learn the handling of machinery, the working of engines of destruction: the cinema can help them. Modern warfare means that people have to be persuaded to do things contrary to their custom and their nature; they have to be persuaded to part with their children, to leave their homes, to eat unaccustomed food, to accept unaccustomed guests. The need for some instrument to perform these tasks of persuasion as well as instruction gave the cinema its chance. And, its powers once displayed, the film has held its place as a weapon of propaganda and information. We should, however, be belittling the functions of the non-fiction film in society were we to overlook a less tangible contribution.

In the 'thirties one or two documentary producers began to experiment with a type of film which, though its setting was fact, permitted the intrusion of imagination into character and story. *North Sea*, for instance, made in 1938 by Cavalcanti and Harry Watt: this story of the ship-to-shore radio service off the north-east coast of Scotland used trawlersmen and radio operators as its actors, but in its shaping of plot allowed itself an element of fiction. Extraordinary things were to proceed, during the war, from this marriage of fact and imagination: *Target for Tonight*, *Western Approaches*, *Fires Were Started*, *Coastal Command*, to name a few: films with not only truth, not only visual beauty, but also human warmth. The documentary film in this country has not always been free of pedantry. But there was no pedantry in the portraits of the airmen in

Target for Tonight, none in the touching conversation piece in *Fires Were Started*, with the firemen singing 'One man went to mow' while they wait for the alarm call. And suddenly the audience which watched these reflections, these reconstructions rather, of the life around it—suddenly the audience was united in a new understanding and sympathy. Suddenly we were taken back to those days of the cinema's innocence when a good film was a good film for everybody. And here, in my opinion, was the triumph of the cinema in war-time. Education for a limited object is important: education for the professions or the crafts. It is important to know about silage and smoke abatement; it may even be important to know how to make short pastry. Education is the skeleton of life: without it society collapses. But society, like the human being, cannot persist as a skeleton only. The story-documentaries made in this country during the war brought into the cinema the living breath.

All this—the documentary film in wartime, the instruction in new techniques of living, the crystallization of national sentiment in the group of fiction-documentaries, the growth in short of what Grierson called 'the creative treatment of actuality'—is our common experience. But in the age of speed even the war years recede from memory, dwindling and fading like a view seen from the last coach of a train; meanwhile a new generation grows up to which our common experience has become dead history. I said just now that the majority of those who go to the cinema have never seen a silent film. Millions today in this country will never have heard of *Target for Tonight*. *Target for Tonight* was made in 1941, and in the lightning life of the cinema seven years is a long time. But the new cinema-generation are going to the films in greater numbers, probably, than their parents before them. The cinema has become a habit with children. They go, of course, to the children's matinées, where they see pieces of varying quality. Some of the new entertainment films being made for child audiences are very good: I do not hope to see a more charming story of adventure than *Bush Christmas*. The residue from the past, on the other hand, is sometimes deplorable: though I am not of the party which believes that the cowboys-and-Indians piece will necessarily breed a race of hooligans. A riskier part in moral education, I fancy, is played by the crude films of urban violence which are to be seen in cinemas for adults: films in which every argument is settled with an automatic, and making an arrest means shooting a man dead. The whole question of the attendance of children at cinemas is at present the subject of a Government inquiry. In the meantime the schools are concerning themselves with the idea of turning the weapon of the cinema to their own use.

The employment of the film as an instrument of education within the school has been

a matter of slow growth in this country. The number of projectors in school use even so lately as 1946 was comparatively small: according to one estimate, seventeen hundred silent projectors and four hundred sound projectors: according to another, a total of three thousand of all types. (Whether the disparity in the estimates is to be accounted for by the secrecy of the schools, or by the deficient mathematical education of the inquirers, I am not prepared to say.) America is far ahead of us here: in Chicago alone there are a thousand school film projectors, in New York eleven hundred. But with the setting up of the National Committee for Visual Aids in Education a new era has, presumably, begun. Teaching films and films strips are produced, scrutinized and used in increasing numbers: geography films, films about natural history and the crafts. Obviously this is laudable, since most children learn more easily through their eyes than through their ears; and I stand self-condemned as a reactionary when I say that, as an obstinately literary type, I am thankful that my formal education is over. But even my kind might have benefited by a little visual aid in, say, geography, where the use of the film as an adjunct to the text-book might serve to correct, for example, the belief, common in my youth, that the population of modern Athens went about in white nightdresses, caught, rather unbecomingly for the full figure, high round the chest.

The cinema, then, is taking its place in laying the foundations of education. Yet I cannot help feeling that the film in schools has other functions than to impart the principles of, say, chemistry. If we look back at the life of the other arts—for I persist in regarding the cinema as an art—we find that they existed for themselves before they were put to alien practical uses. Or rather I should say that they had their origin in humane and religious needs before they became didactic instruments. Man wrote poetry before he began to use language as a means of teaching algebra. The development of the cinema has been so sudden that, almost before it has established its right to existence for its own sake, we are putting it to practical uses. Well, it is to the good that the films should be an instrument in a society which needs more and more instruments. But I think we should not forget that, even within the circle of education, the cinema has a right to be looked at for itself. We use drawing to teach accuracy of eye, we use language to teach geography. But we also teach literature: in our more reckless moods we even teach art. It is useless to complain of the moral and social ill-effects of the cinema if we do not ever suggest to children in the schools, to the new generation of audiences, that there are good films and bad, just as there are good books and bad. In other words I should like to see others follow the example of certain enterprising and enlightened

continued on page 12

Film Society Movement in Australia

by

MALCOLM OTTON

WHEN in 1940 John Grierson came to Australia to strengthen Dominion ties on behalf of the Imperial Relations Trust (and was sent, incidentally, straight to see MGM), there wasn't a solitary Film Society in the length and breadth of the continent.

In the State capitals, a small cinema screened an occasional French film, a *Kermesse Heroique* or a *Carnet de Bal*; the Post Office had a few prints of the GPO Film Unit's documentaries, but public taste for the staple fare of the English Film Societies was yet to be awakened.

But the War years proved that Grierson's suggestions did not fall on deaf ears. Stemming from his talks with various Federal and State Ministers, Documentary Film Committees were set up in Canberra, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Brisbane. They were financed by the Imperial Relations Trust, and immediately proved that there was a lively demand for non-fiction films in Australia. Though short of staff and limited in funds, these State Film Centres swiftly created a wide appreciation of the manifold uses of 16 mm film. Today, financed by their respective State Education Departments, acting too as distributing agents for the National Film Library established in Canberra in 1945, the Centres are the axletrees of the Film Society movement.

During the mid-war years, the spate of documentary films from Great Britain and America rapidly widened the Australian non-theatrical audience, and with the armed forces putting 16 mm to full use, there sprang up a vivid awareness of the power of the cinema as a tool of social criticism and educational construction.

1944 saw leader articles and national broadcasts on Documentary, pioneered by A. K. Stout, Chairman of the NSW Documentary Films Committee and Professor of Philosophy at Sydney University (late of the Edinburgh Film Guild), leading to the foundation of the first Australian Film Society, the Sydney Workers' Educational Association Film Group. Later that year the Australian Film Society (Victorian Division) was set up in Melbourne, while early in 1945 the Sydney Film Society was inaugurated. Then a Society developed around the Canberra Film Centre, several other cities followed suit, and today there are between fifteen and twenty full-time Australian Film Societies in action, with more in process of formation—apart, of course, from countless groups centred around Parents' and Citizens' Associations, Trade Union Clubs, and various social organizations using narrow-gauge film for cultural and educational purposes.

From this brief flashback it is clear that the Australian Film Society movement has a background quite different from that of the British movement. Both are basically concerned with screening the best available films, keen to give screen-space to the new, the unusual and the experimental in cinema. But here in Australia the emphasis has been perforce upon the factual rather than upon the fiction film.

Subscriptions, and funds, have always been low, and the cost of importing Continental features absolutely prohibitive. The few features available have come from one or two small independent importers, or from the Russian Embassy, which brought in such godsend as *Alexander Nevsky*, and Mark Donskoi's *The Rainbow*. But even if more 35 mm features were available, very few Societies would benefit, as the Projectionists' Union bans Sunday screenings, and no cinema will consider one-night stands except on exorbitant terms.

'Trade' opposition to the Film Societies in the past has ranged from violent antagonism to spleenetic apathy, but in the past six months, with the belated but financially successful importation of a few such excellent productions as *Les Enfants du Paradis*, *Open City*, *Symphonie Pastorale*, and *Les Visiteurs du Soir*, two or three managers are beginning to believe (we hope) that the folk who enjoy 'foreign' films are neither long-hairs, 'refos' nor agents of a foreign power, but normal adults with a bias against stereotyped entertainment. 'The Trade' withholds all films, no matter how old, from the Film Societies unless they can fulfil the impossible condition of screening them in a commercial theatre under 'trade' conditions. Sixteen millimetre prints of British features such as *Odd Man Out* and *Brief Encounter* were recently imported by one firm, but their distribution to anyone except boarding schools, nunneries, etc., was immediately banned by 'the trade'. Inquiries made recently about 35 mm prints of *Citizen Kane* and *Grapes of Wrath* met the reply that all prints had been destroyed.

Sixteen millimetre then, bless its heart, has proved and will continue to be the backbone of the Australian Film Societies. Much may be lost, we realize, in quality of sound and image, but perhaps this is compensated for by the friendly informality of Society screenings in the smaller halls and clubrooms so suitable for 16 mm protection. Some country groups, isolated by hundreds of miles, owe their entire existence to the portable substandard projector and the low cost of freight for its films. An attempt is now being made by one or two commercial distributors to build up rural circuits among backblock audiences—this being a field which could be tilled very fruitfully by the State Agriculture Departments.

Relations between the Australian Societies are remarkably cordial, considering the long distances separating them and the natural rivalry of the city groups to scoop the all-too-rare new films. 1949 should see the establishment of a Commonwealth Federation of Film Societies, giving the movement an authoritative national status. In Victoria and Tasmania the move is afoot to set up State Federations, which will collaborate, it is hoped, with the Canberra Film Centre and the Federation of NSW Film Societies.

This latter body, inaugurated early in 1948 after nearly a year's spadework by the Sydney

Film Society, now has some twelve full-time Film Societies as members, and eight part-time Film Groups as affiliates. A regular bulletin is in production, a State Convention of Film Societies with a weekend Summer School is on the calendar later this year, and a representative, John Heyer, Director of the new Shell Australian Film Unit, has been appointed to the NSW Documentary and Educational Films Council.

That Australian Film Society members do not join up merely to 'see something different' is evident from these aims, taken from the Federation Constitution:

'To secure representation on Government and other Committees relating to films.'

'To improve the standard of commercial film programmes for adults and children.'

'To increase the supply of films available to Film Societies and to improve non-theatrical film distribution generally.'

There is general appreciation on all Society Committees of the importance of film as a mass medium, and perhaps a brief survey of the activities of that Society to which I belong, the Sydney Film Society, will demonstrate the truth of this.

The Society has two regular monthly screenings which are advertised as a matter of policy in the Press and open to the general public. A monthly discussion group argues the merits and techniques of films such as Sucksdorff's *Rhythm of a City* or Jennings' *Cumberland Story*. A monthly eight-page magazine with a rising circulation of about 800 is printed (exchanges are welcome), and a growing library of film books is available to members. Last winter a course of lectures on Film Production was held, among the speakers being Stanley Hawes, Harry Watt, and Geoffrey Bell. Social evenings are popular, and discussion is encouraged at all screenings, where distinguished visitors such as Eugene Goossens or Ralph Smart are invited to speak. A Scientific Film Group died an untimely death last year, but a production unit is now mooted; the Committee is constantly conferring with educational and cultural groups to further the appreciation of film in the city. Annual subscription is £1, with a 6d. levy for the Federation, and concessions for students and others under 21.

Much encouragement and assistance has been given to the Film Society movement, particularly in NSW, by the United Kingdom Information Office and the Canadian National Film Board, which both have 16 mm film libraries, and also by the British Council. The growing output of Australian documentaries from the Film Division of the Commonwealth Department of Information, under Producer-in-Chief Stanley Hawes, a colleague of Grierson's in Canada and founder of the Birmingham Film Society, has also given audiences considerable food for thought on home affairs. A spice of variety comes on occasion, too, from the small collections of the French, Czech and Swedish Consultants.

continued on page 11

Realist Tradition in Italian Films

by

R. E. WHITEHALL

THE SPECTACULAR rise of the Italian film industry since the end of the war has been much commented upon, but it has recently been suggested by some writers that the flood of vital films from Italy is in danger of drying up. This suggestion is probably due to the financial difficulties of the Rossellini films, and the commercial failure in Italy of Vittorio de Sica's bitter *Shoeshine*, coupled with the box-office success of some ponderous costume dramas and arid comedies, from which it has been deduced that the realism of so many Italian films is not popular.

This, however, is not entirely a true picture; it overlooks the success of a number of realistic films; it does not take into account the talents of such directors as Rossellini, Luigi Zampa, or that group of Italian directors practically unknown in Britain—Luchino Visconti, Pietro Germi, Giuseppe de Santis, Duilio Coletti—who work in a semi-documentary style; it forgets the naturalistic talents of Aldo Fabrizi or Anna Magnani; and it overlooks the production programme of Lux Films.

This company, Lux, has been in the forefront in the use of factual backgrounds or semi-documentary themes. Between 1945 and 1947 they produced *To Live in Peace*, *Angelina MP* and *An American on Leave*, directed by Luigi Zampa; *Two Anonymous Letters* by Mario Camerini; Anna Magnani's two working-class comedies, *Down with Misery* and *Down with Poverty*, either of which might have come from Chaplin; Alberto Lattuada's *The Crime of Giovanni Episcopo*, with Aldo Fabrizi in the leading role.

Within the last year Lux have produced most of the significant films of the period. Luigi Zampa's *Difficult Years* is a human comedy adapted from a short story by the playwright-novelist Vitaliano Brancati, looking back over twenty years of Fascist rule and the dangers of compromise, treated in the manner of *To Live in Peace*.

Mario Soldati's *Flight into France* is this director's most successful film since *Signor Traveller* in 1946. Forgetting the heavy un-cinematic nature of the novels of Balzac and Fogazzaro which have furnished him with the basis of his last few films, culminating in the unbelievably static *Daniele Cortis*, Soldati took a theme which is part and parcel of post-war Europe—the search for war criminals.

The subject matter is described by the production company thus: 'Many men and women have been tempted by the mirage of a new life beyond the frontiers of their war-ravaged countries to risk the dangers of an illegal crossing of the Alps, discounting the risks of tempest, cold, and death. This is the background of reality to *Fuga in Francia*, the story of a condemned war criminal who, escaping from prison, takes a false name and joins a little band of clandestine emigrants.'

Cold, calculating, without compassion or mercy, the fugitive is deterred by no scruples when he finds himself discovered . . .

The claim that *Flight to France* has a background to reality is no idle one. The main action was shot in the valleys and high passes of the Graian Alps and the unit of 32 people, technicians and players, often worked in a temperature below zero. The approach is pure documentary—only two actors appeared in the film, Folco Lulli and Pietro Germi (this was the latter's first appearance, he is actually an extremely fine director).

The other parts in the film were cast on the spot. The heroine was discovered by Soldati in the Fiat works at Mirafiori, and returned there when the film was completed. Other parts were played by a builder, a journalist, and by the director and the producer of the film. The smaller roles were filled by their real-life counterparts.

Pietro Germi, who played the emigrant who is instrumental in the ultimate death of the war criminal, is a young Genoese graduate of the Centro Sperimentale, the Italian film school, who has made three films, all of which have their roots deep in the real life of the Italian people, and the problems of our time. He is interested in economic conditions as they affect individuals. *The Witness*, while drawing its inspiration from everyday life does so in a traditional way, with its story of a young servant girl trying to save her condemned fiancé; but *Lost Youth* and *In the Name of the Law* go beyond the basic 'thriller' ingredients in their approach. The former deals with a new generation of Italian youth, freed not only from the Fascists but from law and order and all moral standards, while the latter deals with the notorious secret society, the 'Mafia'.

Lost Youth deals, specifically, with a group of university students and with Stefano, the degenerate leader of a gang of youthful criminals. It is a hard, tough film which, as *Shoeshine* did, harks back in many ways to the pre-war social films made by Warner Brothers. It is a study in circumstances and environment shot against actual backgrounds, and so realistic in its approach it proved too strong for the stomachs of the authorities, who banned it—an act creating such a storm of criticism in the film industry the authorities quickly reversed their decision and allowed it to be screened.

In the Name of the Law was again filmed almost entirely on location. It deals with the secret society which supplied America with some of its most notorious gangsters (and Hollywood with some of its best films), stressing the tie-up between these racketeers administering their own brand of justice on the peasants, and the rich landowners who are guaranteed tranquillity on their estates. In the last reel of the film the message underlying the whole work is given in plain words by the honest

judge—the delinquents, the murderers, are no less guilty than those who stand by and do nothing.

Were it only for these films to represent the total achievement of the recent Italian cinema it would constitute a remarkable record, enriching society with the force of their emotional outlook, but the honesty and consistency of the new films by Luchino Visconti and Giuseppe de Santis testifies to the strength of the younger directors who do not seek refuge in escape, and who are not so tired they cannot see the future for the past.

Visconti, known over here by the glowing reports of his *Obsession*—an adaptation of *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, which cannot be shown because it was produced during the war, and the producers omitted to acquire the screen rights—has recently completed *The Earth Trembles*, made on location in Sicily and dealing with the harsh struggle for existence by a community of fishermen. It was made with a cast of non-professional players.

Just as the quality and force in the work of Pietro Germi was apparent in his first film, so the directorial debut of Giuseppe de Santis, formerly a script-writer, has been hailed by the critics during 1948. *Tragic Chase*, made for the ANPI (National Association of Italian Partisans), is set against a peasant background, dealing with Fascists and collaborationists, who prey on the peasants until the latter rise up and destroy them. The second film from this director, *Bitter Rice*, filmed in the rice-fields of northern Italy with Vittorio Gassmann, a very fine actor who was seen in London during the Italian Stage Festival at the Cambridge Theatre. This has only recently been completed, as have Castellani's *In the Sunlight of Rome*, which is supposed to surpass *Shoeshine* in its realism, and Duilio Coletti's *Exodus*, treating on the flight of European Jews to Palestine, with the British-born actress Marina Berti in the lead. This film is made somewhat on the lines of Rossellini's moving piece of reportage from the flaking ruins of Berlin, *Germany Year Zero*.

Dealing, like *Exodus*, with the plight of European Jewry is Geofredi Alessandrini's *Wandering Jew*, somewhat spoiled by the artificiality of its prologue set in ancient Jerusalem, but gripping and vivid when it touches upon the fate of the Jewish people during the war. It deals with a wealthy French Jew (Vittorio Gassmann) who chooses to hide his race and collaborate with the Germans when they reach Paris. He finally chooses to stand by his people, and goes to his death in order to save hostages in a concentration camp from being murdered in retaliation for his resistance. Alessandrini is less sure of himself than most of the other directors, and although moments of *The Wandering Jew* achieve a perfect fusion

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Documentary in Germany

FROM A CORRESPONDENT

A STRIKING compilation film, *Nurnberg* has recently been released in the American Zone of Germany. It was sponsored by American Film Section under the inspiration of Pare Lorentz, who initiated the work in New York. It has been produced by Stuart Schulberg and edited by Jo Zigman. It is a summary of the Nurnberg Trial and has been made in the English and German languages. It gives a calm, unemotional summary of the proceedings and the results. Originally it was intended to build the commentary wholly from extracts from the speeches of the prosecution, defence and the witnesses, but this was found impossible. So the commentary takes the form of a précis. The film is remarkable for a number of reasons. In the first place, a great proportion of it is built up from material taken in the courts, and one has ample time to study the faces and bearing of the protagonists. A less courageous producer would have been tempted to cut away, and to allow only a minimum of the film to take place in the court. Schulberg and Zigman decided otherwise and their decision is amply justified by results.

The court scenes are supported by a collection of seized library material, including a record of a pogrom enlarged from 8 mm, and some scenes of an improvised gas chamber. To give an idea of the mentality of some of the people who took these films, the gas chamber scenes were found on 16 mm casually inserted among idyllic scenes of the countryside of occupied Poland. They had been dropped in as if they were an ordinary part of an enjoyable week's leave. The film is more than an indictment of the leaders of fascism. Though the commentary makes a sharp distinction between Nazis and Germans, the ordinary onlooker must draw the conclusion that the ramifications of the plot were so wide and deep that every German person was to some extent a participant, not only on the battlefield, but in the torture chamber. In days when some people would ask us not to give the matter of Germany's guilt another thought, the film gives a salutary reminder of things which happened only a little over three years ago. Since it has been shown with considerable success in the American Zone of Germany, it suggests that, for the first time, the German people themselves may be taking stock of their own record.

Between them, the British and American Film Sections have been responsible for promoting a number of documentary films in Germany, and at long last the movement looks like taking hold of the imagination both of producers and the public. All the films are made by German units. As one might expect, the styles of the films from the two zones are in contrast, those from the American tending to rely on library compilation and, more often than not, deliberately pointing a moral. Those from the British side tend more to be objective accounts of what is going on. They rely less on library material and more on actuality shooting.

Hunger—a joint production of the British and American Film Sections, distributed mandatorily to every cinema in the American and British Zones, was a joint affair. It was built up from library material and was issued in the spring of 1948. It was designed to make clear that much of the starvation and hunger in Germany was caused by a dislocation of world agriculture, caused, in its turn, by the German war. It explains that our Indian and other Eastern Allies have a better claim on world food supplies than the German people. The film also pointed out that a great deal of food in Germany, designed for the ration, was being diverted to the black market, owing to faulty and corrupt German administration. Since that time, American Film Section has sponsored a number of films dealing directly with the moods, feelings and outlooks of the German people. *It's Up To You* contrasts two kinds of Germany before the war. The gentle, industrious, religious Germany and the tough, fierce, cruel Germany. These two contrasts, the film says, were present before the war. Which is to predominate in the future? *Marschieren, Marschieren!* made by Renaissance Film and produced by Gerhard Born, says, quite simply, that everyone who marches to the beat of a military band and becomes hypnotized by martial music sooner or later marches to his death. *Ich und Mr Marshall* deals with the relations of the Marshall Plan in Western Germany.

Other films in production deal with life in Berlin, the free German Press, racial toleration, the air bridge and the Joint Import-Export Agency. All the films so far released are well-paced polished one-reelers.

The British Film Section is inspiring films dealing with the day-to-day life of Germany, designed at once to make the public well-informed on current problems of the day, and to influence people to be more tolerant towards one another. *Lebensadern* is a documentary dealing with transport. It explains how the present difficulties arise. It points to difficulties overcome and it says that, given initiative, the German people have in themselves resources to bring the transport system back to the point of efficiency which was once the envy of Europe. The film ends with a moving ceremony of the first train to cross the repaired Hohenzollern Bridge at Cologne. Another film deals with returning prisoners-of-war. It suggests that this problem is not being tackled as sympathetically as it might be by some Burgomeisters, already driven to distraction by shortages of housing. It puts in a claim for more sympathy, more tact and more practical treatment. A film in production on the raising of wrecks in Kiel harbour is as exciting a piece of documentary journalism as one will see anywhere. Yet another deals with the rehabilitation of the German fishing industry. At least one documentary worker of note has come up in the British Zone. His name is Rudolph Kipp. His shooting has a freshness and strength which

many a British documentary director and camera man will envy. Finally, one must not overlook the German workers in Berlin, mainly concentrating on trick films and labouring under the greatest of difficulties. Nevertheless, Lotte Reiniger is getting ahead with silhouette films and two other people are beginning to make remarkable progress. Hans Böke is making puppet films, and the illustrator and artist, Frans Haakon, has begun to make cartoon films which show great promise.

No note about films in Germany can omit the newsreel *Welt in Film*. This is a joint Anglo-American affair, though produced almost wholly by German film men. The shooting is as good as any newsreel in the world. If by virtue of its position it avoids some political topics, its treatment of contemporary life in Germany has a raciness and quality of observation which puts it in a class by itself.

AN AMERICAN FILM

Round Trip. Producer: Raymond Spottiswood. Director: Roger Barlow. Produced by The World Today Inc. for 20th Century Fund.

20th Century Fund is an association in America which seeks to promote a liberal economic policy. It stands for free trade in America, for the lowering or total removal of tariff barriers. The film hopes to convince the Americans that American prosperity ultimately depends on the free flow of trade, and not in the artificial protection of inefficient industries in America, when it would be cheaper to purchase abroad and allow an inefficient industry to close down. Technically, the film takes the form of a trans-continental and trans-oceanic argument between an isolationist businessman, transport workers, producers and workers in Europe and Latin-America. The speakers call out to each other and argue, and the isolationist businessman is finally reduced by having his clothes and watch whisked away from him, since the former were made in Britain of British cloth and the latter in Switzerland. To an English mind, the arguments seem a little strange until one realizes that the film is flogging a horse which died in Britain about 1848. In short, America is now where Britain was a hundred years ago, and seeking to explain to herself that a country cannot sensibly be a creditor nation, and have tariff walls. The argument is as valid in America today as it was in Britain a hundred years ago. Technically, the film is well made. The characters are well cast and speak their minds with relish. The fact that dialogues take place across gaps of thousands of miles gives the film a kind of universality which stimulates the imagination. It is distributed in the States non-theatrically, and is not available in Britain.

BOOK REVIEWS

The Film in Society

British Cinemas and Their Audiences: J. P. Mayer. (Dobson. 279 pp. 15s.).

The Negro in Films: Peter Noble. (Skelton Robinson. 288 pp. 15s.).

Kierkegaard wrote: 'The Crowd is untruth'. The *dictum* implies that 'somewhat contemptuous attitude towards the masses', which Mr Mayer condemns in the other four writers and disclaims in himself. But no sociologist will agree that the crowd whom Mr Mayer has collected together for analysis in his book can tell the truth about British cinemas and their audiences. As sociology, the book is bad. It is slovenly, misleading and thoroughly unscientific. It is not about cinema audiences at all, but about a particular section of those audiences, the most vocal section, the cinema fans. What else is to be expected when the source of the author's information is a questionnaire addressed to the readers of *Picturegoer*?

Having said this, let us record, in deference to the preface, that we are familiar with Professor Allport's study on *The Use of Personal Documents in Psychological Science*, that we have referred to Mr Mayer's bibliography, have re-read his *Sociology of Film*, and carefully noted the quotations, historical and otherwise, which lend a certain pretentiousness to his text. In spite of all this it is impossible to maintain that Mr Mayer has made more than a superficial contribution to the study of the function and influence of the cinema in society. Such a work is of vital importance. It remains to be done.

To criticize the present book does not imply that its documents are uninteresting, even when seen as a cross-section of the views of British cinema fans. Very much more could have been done with them. They emphasize that one of the most compelling reasons for cinema attendance is the desire to escape from the realities of everyday life. Frequent assertions of this nature should have led a conscientious social scientist to investigate more deeply the causes of such behaviour. This would be an important contribution towards understanding the function of the cinema in our society.

The documents indicate that the early interest of children in the cinema frequently arises because adults, in order to see films themselves, have no alternative but to take their children with them. In this way a child of six weeks was taken to the cinema. The ages of two, three and four are often quoted as the age when films were first seen. This is an indication of the influence of social conditions upon film habits rather than of the influence of films on social habits. Once again, Mr Mayer does not face the implications. It is not only a question of more and better children's films and of raising the content of general film production from its present level. It is a question of more nurseries and crèches, more

youth facilities, more and more alternatives to supplement the one recreational activity whither all too many children today must turn.

Again, the documents indicate, the extent to which films from America bring with them and spread, in this country and elsewhere, American ideas and conceptions of 'the American way of life'. How powerful is the impact of this medium, not only upon the cinematograph industries, but also upon the cultural independence of the countries most closely concerned! How little attention, relative to its importance, has this question received! Mayer ignores it.

If his audience selection is arbitrary, the author is equally arbitrary in his selection of films. Such a fault follows inevitably from the use of *Picturegoer*. He deals only with the influence of feature films and apparently excludes the influence of the documentary film in spite of the fact that its audience is rapidly growing and now exceeds an annual total of twelve million people.

A responsible study of cinema audiences surely involves an assessment of the attitude which the cinema has taken up on the important social questions of the day, whether it takes this attitude openly and clearly, as in documentary films, or more subtly, as in feature films. Only thus, can one reach any conclusion about the role and function of the cinema in contemporary society. Such an approach never seems to have occurred to Mr Mayer. He is too steeped in academic method and the academic outlook. Moreover, he seems to despair (p. 10) of the power of man to control the society of which cinematic art is so faithful a reflection. He writes: 'We are small wheels within a big machine. We are tools which others handle. We serve the machines, we perform routine duties without grasping the meaning of the whole. The complex rationality of the world of which we are a part, is torn from our instincts and sentiments. Beliefs—we no longer have.'

Mr Noble measures the influence of the cinema against one of the great social problems of the day. He does so by examining the content of a large number of films which deal directly or indirectly with this problem. In spite of the fact that a social study of audiences lies outside the scope of his book, the evidence he presents and the conclusions which he draws are, we submit, of greater sociological significance than those of the professional sociologist whose work we have just reviewed.

The book demonstrates how an art reflects the material conditions of the society which gives rise to it. By tracing in films discrimination against the Negro race from early silent days until the end of the late war he shows in what way the real conditions of the American way of life, the fierce persecution of the Negroes in American society, find their expression on the screen and

elsewhere. He shows, too, how discrimination is reflected in other ways, limiting the freedom of the screen, and restricting negro film production.

The great weakness of the book lies in its extremely narrow approach to this problem. The author never steps outside its reflection in films and on the stage. Consequently, fortified by the author's own proposals, the reader is left with the impression that somehow the monstrous crime of the colour-bar can be fought, and perhaps conquered, in the relatively narrow sphere of art unrelated to the political and economic struggle outside this sphere. Mr Noble never explains the role of the colour-bar in present-day American society, nor does he make any really effective proposals for its eradication. Neither the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, nor the International Film and Radio Guild, nor the Independent Citizens' Committee, nor documentary films, nor personal letters to the Press, all of which he rightly indicates have a role in the fight, can do the slightest good unless they become a part of the whole struggle taking place in the world today, for or against the right of its citizens to live a full and free life.

If we approach the question in this way we throw into relief the other limitation in Mr Noble's approach. Not all the Negroes of the world and not the only colour-bar exist in the USA. True, he briefly indicates some of the ways in which colour prejudice gains expression in this country. But to represent, as he does, that it is only a secondary problem in Western Europe compared with America, is to ignore the implications of the colonial system, which find their expression in the cinema as in every other sphere of national life and which, in their total effect, are as evil as the discrimination practised in the Southern States.

The artificiality of much of contemporary film production is too well known to need emphasis here. The real conditions of the Negro peoples cannot be fully and truthfully portrayed because it would be such an indictment of the system under which they live. Hence their manner of living can only become a subject for documentary films, without explanation as to how the conditions portrayed came about, or be falsified in the now traditional treatment of Negro characters in most American feature films. In either case Negro susceptibilities are rightly injured.

The author emphasizes that everyone has a personal duty in combating the colour-bar, but his omission to place the problem in its proper context means that he can put forward no proper solution for the problem with which he deals.

In spite of its weakness, however, the book is a valuable weapon in a fight, which too often in this country we regard as no affair of ours.

No Matter of Black and White

by

George Stoney

CHIEF CHARACTERS in Mr Noble's newest divertissement on films, named in ascending order of righteousness, are: Old Devil Hollywood, who, when he occasionally does something that seems admirable, is merely being two-faced; British Film-makers, often misguided but essentially Good; Foreign Film-makers, who form a seraphic chorus with those from the USSR singing most sweetly.

But patience a moment. Mr Noble has put into print for us the dilemma that greets anyone who sets out to make an honest and useful film in which Negroes are to appear.

'The really ideal film,' he says, 'would be one in which Negroes and Whites are shown working together and living together in complete harmony, as neighbours, with only the occasional discords arising from any normal human relationships.' Then in the next sentence he asks for realism.

Again, after asking repeatedly that Negroes not be treated as special individuals on the screen, he says, '... the intelligent cinemagoer very naturally condemns all films which show the Negro in an unsympathetic light...' Now, in Mr Noble's view *any* Negro who appears on the screen is, willy-nilly, also 'the Negro', no individual but a representative of his race. By massing quotations from the letters and reviews of Negro actors and intellectual leaders the author indicates that his remarks are a fair consensus of their opinions, too.

Illogical? Perhaps, yet Mr Noble illustrates through such contradictions the basic film reactions that cluster about this problem.

These reactions film-makers who are trying to make useful films in which Negroes appear must keep for ever at the front of their minds. This is especially important for cutters, since it is through what one might call 'psycho-sociological editing' (pardon the coinage!) that one can solve, or at least avoid, many of the difficulties raised not only by Negroes but by other groups whom society has caused to feel sensitive about the way they are represented on the screen.

Let us apply this to a familiar sequence in a documentary: You have a scene of rickety houses, ragged children, primitive toilet facilities, a scene which to you, the editor, says, 'Look how these poor people must live; something needs to be done'. Yet if there are Negro children shown the sequence may say to members of that race simply: 'Here is how typical Negroes live—like pigs.' And so it speaks to most white people, too, whether they live in London, Lagos or in the southern US where I make films. Negroes know this stereotype in most white minds all too well. (See, for example, the storm of protest from London-educated natives that greeted the showing in Lagos of *This Modern Age—Nigeria*.)

Editing can avoid many such reactions by prefacing the scene of slums with a contrast that features people of the same race or, as we do very often in our films for the southern US, use a scene with white people in slums immediately preceding that with Negroes. Thus the

condition rather than the race of the people shown is made the important thing.

Similarly the immediate reaction of an audience (particularly a hostile one) to the race of your character before they consider his individual personality or his actions can be avoided very often by introducing long or mid-shots in which he is shown doing something, e.g. long-shot of a school teacher who... (m.s.) happens to be a Negro; or (l.s.) a man in overalls... (m.s.) is loading a crane, and as we watch him (c.u.) he appears to be a Negro.

There is no rule-of-thumb for this kind of cutting. Most strangely, for example, what seems a perversely provocative cut in earlier sequences of a film becomes quite acceptable in its latter stages. This seems equally true for both White and Negro audiences.

Thus the important thing for the film-maker to keep in mind is not just what appears to him true and obvious, but what the presentation of this visual truth will mean to his audience. Somehow he must take into consideration all the preconceptions, the stereotypes and prejudices that the viewers will add to what he, the film-maker, is going to put on the screen.

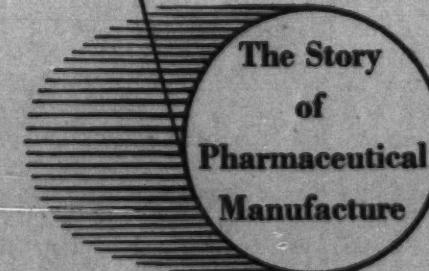
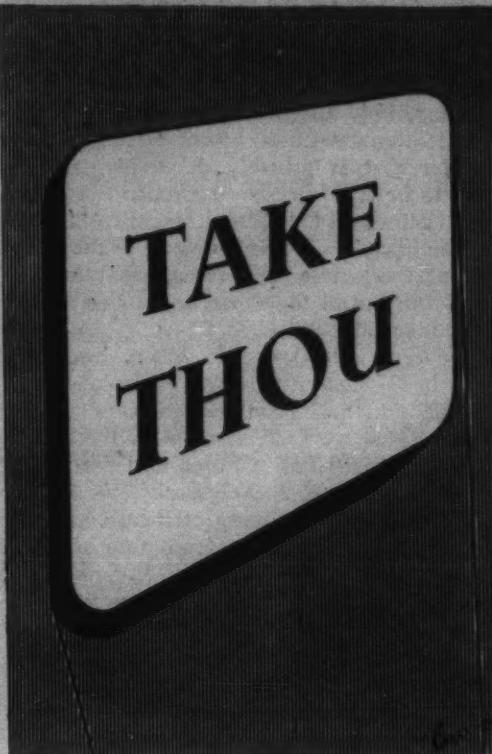
Though a protester against stereotypes and distorted pictures, Mr Noble indulges in these sins himself to a remarkable degree when he discusses America in general and the south in particular. Many statements he makes about film censorship in the south are simply untrue. He appears to think the censor in Memphis controls the film programmes for all of Dixie, which is about as true as saying that the 'Wee Frees' control the drinking habits of all Scotland.

Nowhere does he indicate a consciousness that the US has but ten per cent of the world's roughly 137,000,000 Negroes (of whom forty per cent live within the British Empire), for he concludes:

'There is much ignorance and prejudice in the world concerning the Negro race and it is certainly the duty of the US Government to dispel this lack of knowledge.... True enough, yet leadership among all Negro groups must be developed before this can be done. The vast majority of Negro educators, scientists, artists, writers and intellectual leaders whose lives Mr Noble asks to see portrayed on the screen are found among America's ten per cent. The US was the training ground and home of all except two of the Negro actors whom he considers worthy of individual biographies. Judging by his own accounts, too, these men and women have had lives not unlike white members of their profession while the two actors drawn from the British Empire whom he gives honour could get a start in this country only after making names for themselves as professional wrestlers.'

... All of which goes to prove that the role of accuser becomes neither of us. (And it also proves, I note with amusement, how much 'psycho-sociological' cutting we southerners require!)

R



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NEW DOCUMENTARY FILMS

✓ Trained to Serve. Crown Film Unit for the C.O.I. 1,457 feet.

Trained to Serve is the third in a series of COI made in Germany by Graham Wallace of the Crown Film Unit, working with German film technicians. The other two films were *KRO Germany*, 1947 and *School in Cologne*.

Contemporary films, when dealing with a situation that is possibly debatable, are inclined to be tepid in their approach. Facts are given, but not all the facts. In most cases there is a simplification of the problem, to the detriment of the whole. It was apparent in *One Man's Story*, and the same impression is left on the mind in *Trained to Serve*.

The film indicates that when hostilities ceased in Germany, there was no police force available that had been trained to serve the community as we understand it in this country. The German Police Force had been used as a heavy arm of the Gestapo, and it was necessary to recruit a body of men, and train them in the traditions of a democratic security force.

We are shown the black market, prostitutes, and juvenile delinquents, in fact the whole bag of tricks. Social problems being dealt with, even under the guidance of the Control Commission, do not necessarily contribute to social stability. This film says that the situation is difficult, but that everything is going to plan. Is it?

✓ Artificial Insemination of Cattle. Made by Darlington Hall Film Unit for C.O.I. Approx. 900 feet.

Artificial Insemination of Cattle is an excellent film that can be fairly called a first-class instructional record. Artificial insemination, when applied to homo sapiens, has provoked considerable argument. Cows evidently have no scruples. As the film ably demonstrates, this is all to the good, because, with care and training, artificial means of reproduction enables the small farmer to build good class dairy herds and livestock, for the payment of 25 shillings service fee.

Prior to the introduction of this scheme, which is sponsored by the Ministry of Agriculture and the National Farmers' Union, the quality of the dairy herds in this country was conditioned by the economic circumstances of the farmer. With the introduction of this plan there appears to be no reason why there should not be a progressive improvement in the value and quality of livestock.

Films of this nature can be dull, very dull, but this film tells its story in a straightforward and scientific manner, with excellent visuals and an unobtrusive commentary.

✗ Hill Sheep Farm. Campbell Harper Films Ltd., for Department of Agriculture C.O.I. 20 minutes. 1,682 feet.

A film which demonstrates the urgent need to repopulate and reform the Highlands of Scotland against a background of the destruction of Scottish sheep farming and the general decline of Scottish agriculture.

The shepherd's job is a skilled job, vital for all. This film shows how he wages his battle with nature almost single-handed. It leaves us regretting what might be done with help better planned and more generous than the Hill Farming Act provides. Direction and photography are good. The film moves rapidly and has a refreshing authenticity.

✓ Scottish Universities. Data Film Unit for C.O.I. and the Scottish Home Department. Director: Francis Gysin. Running time: 22 minutes.

Unbelievably dreadful and pompous. The film moves in the manner of a tired professor, on whose behalf the commentator reads a lecture.

Most of the problems of university life receive a mention, which is about all that can be said in the film's favour—unless we add that its very dullness indicates in a negative kind of way how far behind the times our universities move. It is understood the Unit encountered many outside difficulties and conflicting opinions during production. They are reflected in the film.

~~X~~ AN AMERICAN FILM

Florida—Wealth or Waste. Produced by the Southern Educational Film Production Service. Written by George Stoney. Camera by Leo Seltzer. Length: 3 reels (?)

Those who have always regarded American documentary as lying somewhere between Chevrolet advertising films and the purity of Bob Flaherty will do well to examine the specifics of a modest self-confident little film called *Florida—Wealth or Waste*. Therein is to be found, among other things, that pleasing sense of gusto which comes, or used to, when producers embrace the difficult with enthusiasm, and when films, having taken on almost too much, arrive breathlessly at the end title, conscious of having done and said a good deal, and said and done it well.

Consider as sponsor, in general a Region, comprising six south-eastern states of the United States, and in particular the State of Florida with its jostling attributes and competing interests, its geography and climate, its forests and orange groves and farmlands and sponge beds and fisheries, and that most mystical and marvellous of all resources in the eyes of the Chamber of Commerce—the Tourist Trade.

Consider further that the legend which gives the State of Florida its special quality is the legend of limitlessness—of inexhaustible fertility, of expendable plenty, the bounteous extravagance of nature bestowing on native and tourist alike endless oranges, endless sunshine, endless sea beaches, with the Chamber of Commerce wisely adding its own bounty of endless parades, bands, board-walk attractions, bathing beauties and luxury hotels.

The Southern Educational Film Production Service, with grave and honest regard for the needs and interests of its sponsors, enters wholeheartedly into the picture postcard view of the state, moves soberly over the denuded devastated exploited farm and timber lands without reproaching any component part of the sponsors,

defines a Florida which is far from perpetual plenty, and begins decisively about the end of reel two to pull an educational film on conservation and the planning of resources out of all that has gone before.

Some of us may wonder that in the richest and most powerful nation on earth it is necessary to calculate the attitudes of conservation with such caution, and present them so deftly and carefully. But they are new attitudes to a country which has hitherto suffered little under reckless extravagance and the waste of its resources.

Nothing better can be said of a unit than that it truly understands its local and national problems, and that it finds as well the effective idiom to make that understanding prevail. *Florida—Wealth or Waste* by gearing the policy of conservation to the most local of needs has also done a good job for FAO in the United States. And while it is busy on the long slow task of creating new attitudes to resources, it contrives at the same time to suggest that Negroes, given the potential of skills and opportunities, might also have something to contribute to the future of the south.

But for the audience which isn't concerned with how difficult it must have been to launch these particular arguments in this particular situation, it is anyway a good film to look at. It is a better piece of information for the United States than those expensive Voice of America broadcasts which prove that the *New York Times* is an objective newspaper and etcetera.

BASIL WRIGHT

his vigorous and forthright

THE USE OF THE FILM

Basil Wright's title, *The Use of the Film*, reveals the angle of his approach, and whilst he has much to say about the actual making of films he bears in mind throughout that they are always made for some use or other. He covers concisely the nature of this great new mass medium, its enormous potentialities, the present position of Hollywood and the future of the British Film industry.

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THE BODLEY HEAD

Gentlemen's Agreement

MR SAMUEL GOLDWYN recently resigned from the Motion Picture Association of America. On the strength of that resignation the following exchange of greetings took place between Mr Goldwyn and Mr Eric Johnston.

Mr Samuel Goldwyn said: . . . 'I have resigned from MPAA in order to give my undivided support to the interests of the Society of Independent Motion Picture Producers. . . The future of good motion pictures is completely bound up with the efforts of Independent Producers to bring this about.'

Mr Johnston said: . . . During his association with us Mr Goldwyn has demonstrated a unique flair of saying one thing and doing exactly the opposite. Mr Goldwyn's fabulous material success in the motion picture industry is irrefutable proof that free enterprise and free opportunity exist in a very real and positive way for all producers. Mr Goldwyn's statement is the latest example of his penchant for getting into violent disagreement with himself on all sides of a question.

Mr Goldwyn retorted: 'It is unfortunate for

the industry that Mr Eric Johnston's manners are as bad as his judgment. . . During the period that Mr Johnston has been president the public relations of the industry have declined alarmingly. Mr Johnston's contributions to building fine relations has consisted mostly of turning the offices of the MPAA into a personal Press bureau for Mr Eric Johnston. This is not surprising in view of the fact that all this time Mr Johnston has been preening himself to accept call to public office. The overwhelming silence of the public with respect to Mr Johnston's political ambitions has unfortunately not prevented him from devoting his major efforts to his personal objectives. . . As far as I have been able to observe Mr Johnston's chief contribution to the economic stability of the industry has been to give it such advice as has caused the filing of law suits against the MPAA and various of its members totalling some \$65,000,000—one of which has been decided against the company involved. The industry has survived many misfortunes and I am confident that it will survive Eric Johnston.'

FESTIVAL 1951

THE BOARD OF Governors of the British Film Institute have announced the appointment of Mr John D. Ralph as Executive Officer responsible for organizing the film side of the Festival of Britain, 1951.

Mr Ralph has been associated during the last five years with the National Film Board of Canada where he served in various capacities including Production Secretary and later as Director of Distribution. He was responsible for organizing the Board's extensive network of rural circuits and urban film libraries and developing the international distribution of Canadian films through theatrical and non-theatrical channels in Great Britain, France, United States, Australia and other countries.

Before joining the Board, he worked in radio, and films, as an actor, and later as a writer and commentator. He has also had experience in finance.

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Film Society Movement in Australia—continued from page 5

All these libraries, like the State Film Centres, find the demand for films far and away beyond the possibilities of supply. Fortunately, however, the evergreen problem of broadening the scope of our programmes has recently been thoroughly tackled by the National Film Library. Last year a batch of 16 mm prints which included *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*; *The Battleship Potemkin*; *The Italian Straw Hat*, and the *Great Train Robbery* was imported from the British Film Institute. These films had a rapturous reception, and came as a blood transfusion to the Society movement generally. Now we're all sniffing the air like Bisto Kids, waiting for a far larger batch already on the water, and reported to contain *Birth of a Nation*; *The General Line*; *Mother*; *The Last Laugh*; *Menilmontant*; *The Seashell and the Clergyman*, and many others too.

Gone for ever are the days when programme committees tore their hair, trying to decide between a mangled version of *Ten Days that Shook the World* and a 9.5 mm re-hash of *The Edge of the World*. Reared for so long on the hard feed of 'documentary-and-educational' the Australian Film Society movement is probably a little collar-proud at the moment, and apt to kick over the traces at the prospect of these long-dreamed-of exotic fruits. But their coming will not, I think, show a swing away from the realist film for long, but rather that fuller appreciation of the achievements, the complexities and the possibilities of the medium as a whole, which should be the aim of every Film Society.

Realist Tradition in Italian Films—continued from page 6

of poetic and realistic, other moments recall his *Furia*, the saga of a sex-starved wife of a horse-breeder who is the Italian counterpart of Miss Blandish.

Another film with a racial theme is Alberto Lattuada's *Without Pity*, featuring John Kitzmuller, who played the negro GI in *To Live in Peace*. Lattuada's best-known work is his 1945 documentary *The Italian Army in the Liberation of the Country*.

Of the directors known to us through films publicly shown in this country, Luigi Zampa is in process of completing *Children of Chance* for a British company; Rossellini is preparing the Rome sequence of *A Tale of Five Cities*, while Vittorio de Sica has just completed *The Bicycle Stealers*, with a largely non-professional cast. The film, the story of an Italian workman who has his bicycle stolen, has been bitterly attacked by *L'Osservatore Romano* (The Vatican newspaper) because it pokes fun at the holding of Mass.

Good intentions are such a novel state of the mind in the cinema that one may be forgiven for falling into the great error of thinking that is all a film needs, but as the hardening tradition of realism in the Italian cinema is formed into a more mature whole, more sure of itself the cinematic design of the Italian film is becoming stronger and abler. There is the quality of life in these films, there is a truth beside which a so-called human document such as *Monsieur Vincent* qualifies for Madame Tussaud's.

Film in Educational and Social Life—continued from page 4

schools where a beginning has been made in the teaching of film appreciation parallel with the teaching of literary appreciation. You may say that there are not enough good films—films suitable for the purpose. That argues a pessimism which I do not share. For if you turn not to the deliberately educational cinema, but to the vast cinema of fiction about which I began by speaking, there are enough serious, beautiful and exciting films, there are enough aesthetically stimulating passages even in unequal films, to form the basis for a hundred courses in the study of the screen. The Continental cinema and the America classics, Eisenstein and René Clair, Griffith and Chaplin—and today we have at last something of our own to offer. We have our versions of English classics—for the cinema reverts, overmuch indeed, to its early reliance on literary originals. We have our Dickens films. We have our Shakespeare films; and, whatever the controversy over *Henry V* and *Hamlet*, these two have taught us to look again at Shakespeare (the French, that acute race, realized before we knew it ourselves that Olivier had given us something new here: not a photographed stage play, but film-theatre). And we have a small group of simple and moving fiction films which, learning from the documentary, have set before us in terms at once realistic and poetic the life of our own country and our own people. Let us by all means use the cinema for factual instruction. But let us also use it to educate in the broadest sense of the word: to prepare and equip for life, and to do it through art, which is itself the distillation of life.

CORRESPONDENCE

February 15, 1949

DEAR SIR,

Referring to the polemic published in your last issue, I would be grateful if you would publish the following extract from my lecture* on Len Lye's work.

'There is a gap of six years between *Tusalava* and *Colour Box*. I was then Grierson's right-hand man at the GPO Film Unit and I remember that Len Lye came to see us and said that he wanted to make a film without a camera. It took a lot of his personal charm to make us listen to him, but when he had explained what he wanted to do both Grierson and myself were convinced that he could do it. Grierson, that king of show-men, would not miss this opportunity. Furthermore, it sounded frightfully simple.'

I hope this will put a stop to an obvious and slightly unpleasant mis-construction of what I said in the lecture.

Yours sincerely

CAVALCANTI

*Published in 'Sight and Sound'.

DEAR SIR,

Hoping, one day, to have a firm understanding of film art behind me I always make an effort to see the critics' point of view. But in the case of *Paisa* I just could not enthuse with them. Even the public seemed against me, for

it has obviously found 'something' in *Paisa* to keep it so long and so successfully at the Academy Cinema.

So Peter Brinson's article *Rossellini and Us: Paisa* provided the necessary support for me to persist in my opinion.

As Peter Brinson says, *Paisa* is the work of a master—a master of the documentary technique. It surprises me that this fact alone should have attracted the public, because none could admit to having been moved by the film. And after all its subject should move us. The subject and the technique cancel each other out.

Paisa has for its subject Emotion. The emotional impact of two peoples thrown violently together; the emotional reaction of the Italian, from urchin to priest, to the American soldier; the emotional reaction of the American soldier, from negro MP to OSS leader, to the Italian. Yet the way in which Rossellini has treated this subject has led critics to judge the film as a documentary of a military advance. Else why the childish carp about the anti-British attitude?

Readers of DOCUMENTARY FILM NEWS need no reminder that documentary is the objective technique which appeals to the brain in presenting facts and problems which can only be settled by clear thinking. When a director's subject is Emotion he must appeal to our emotions, he must make us feel. No one can feel when the cold-blooded wall of perfect documentary is down between the person and the subject. No one, not even Rossellini, can documentalize Emotion.

J. ELLIS PARK

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CINE - BIOLOGY

PHOTOMICROGRAPHY

D. Grayson, B.Sc.

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The Scottish critics, who should know, praise 'Waverley Steps' as a human and authentic film.

Some of the London critics have written about it in equally glowing terms.

The film cost half as much as one would imagine from the results on the screen.

See it for yourself.

The film is produced by Greenpark Productions, whose artists, directors and craftsmen have given you 'A String of Beads', 'Five Towns', 'They Gave Him the Works', 'Cyprus is an Island', and many more.

There are many more to come.

SUNDAY EXPRESS
19 SEPT. 48

From the festival

So much interest was caused in Edinburgh by the best of the new documentary films shown during the festival that a special showing of them had to be arranged in London last week. I have already written about Robert Flaherty's "Louisiana Story," but I have only now seen "Waverley Steps," which has far more than mere Scottish interest.

It is a fascinating film, and I recommend it as an example of the interpretive (lyrical) would not be too high a word, screen style as opposed to the purely reportorial, and as an indication of the possibilities inherent in unexploited in a Scottish setting and unexploited.

Paul Fletcher the producer, John Eldridge the director, and John Summerfield the writer, must share credit, though I have no means of knowing who contributed exactly what.

A programme note, in which I think I detect the hand in which Grierson sums up the approach, perfectly by saying the film makes no concessions to the notion that Edinburgh is the Athens of the north, the capital of the Stuarts, and the home town of David Hume and the age of enlightenment. Metropolis itself, with a ghost in every stone."

THE film is built around a bunch of incidents A railway fireman arrives on a night train and has a day off in his tenement home. A Scandinavian sailor wanders around the sights, and spends the evening in a local pub.

A coalman goes about his business enlivened by a midday bet with a street bookie. A miserable bigamist is tried and goes to jail. A little romance starts between two medical students.

An Englishman who had never been to Edinburgh found the picture told him a lot of interesting human things which no film could ever have done.

The Scottish Office deserves credit for having sponsored so unobvious and imaginative a treatment of a theme which might have been ironed into mediocrity by conventional handling.

The documentary is at last being appreciated in a land which has produced great documentary makers like John Grierson and Harry Watt.

It was Dr. John Grierson who once described the documentary as "the creative interpretation of reality." One film about Scotland which I saw premiered at this year's Festival lives up nobly to that description.

"Waverley Steps" is its title. An English unit made it, a near-brilliant impression of life in present-day Edinburgh. Few documentaries can surely have caught the atmosphere of a city in more human or authentic fashion.

Here are real people living as we know them. I hope we have many more documentaries like "Waverley Steps."

Scotland is teeming with subjects for such feature films.

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